



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Cholera

What is cholera?

Cholera is a serious bacterial infection of the intestines that may result in severe, watery diarrhea. Bacteria called *Vibrio cholerae* cause cholera. Cholera occurs more often in countries that do not have treated drinking water or good sewage treatment. Those who are at highest risk of getting cholera are persons traveling to foreign countries where cholera is common. Cholera is rare in the United States.

How do you get it?

Cholera is spread by eating food or drinking water contaminated by the stool or vomitus of someone infected with cholera. Cholera can be spread in the home if someone who is infected with the bacteria prepares food for others.

What are the symptoms of cholera?

The symptoms of cholera include sudden onset of mild to severe watery diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration. There can also be leg cramps. Usually there is no fever and no blood in the stool.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually appear 2 to 3 days after eating or drinking food or water contaminated with the bacteria, but can occur as early as a few hours after ingestion.

What is the treatment for cholera?

Severe diarrhea and/or vomiting over a long time may cause the body to lose fluid too quickly. Lost fluids should be replaced by drinking liquids such as fruit juices, soups, and special fluids called oral rehydration salts. Occasionally, fluid loss is so severe that fluids need to be given through the veins. A doctor

may also prescribe antibiotics to shorten the duration of the diarrhea and shedding of the bacteria in the stool.

Is there a vaccine for cholera?

At the present time, there is no licensed cholera vaccine available in the United States. No cholera vaccine requirements exist for exit or entry in any country.

How do you keep from getting it?

- Avoid drinking untreated water (streams, lakes, and ponds) or water from unknown sources. Drink only water that you have boiled or treated with chlorine or iodine.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap after using the bathroom, after changing diapers, and before preparing foods.
- Cook and eat all foods soon after they are prepared. Avoid undercooked or raw fish or shellfish.
- Ensure the proper disposal of all bodily wastes (including the laundering or disposal of soiled diapers).
- During a cholera outbreak or while traveling in countries known to have cholera, avoid eating raw vegetables and fruits you cannot peel yourself. Also, be careful of cooked or uncooked foods that require handling by the bare hands of someone else.

For more information, see the CDC's website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/cholera_g.htm